

The Federal Court Goes Electronic!

On October 14, 2003, the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut will convert to a new case management and electronic case filing system (CM/ECF). What exactly is CM/ECF? It is an internet-based filing system which will replace the existing case management system used by the federal courts nationwide. The benefits include: savings in paper and mailing costs, 24-hour access to files, and more importantly, attorneys will have access to the courts, regardless of where their office is located. **Effective October 14, 2003**, attorneys practicing in Connecticut's federal courts will be asked to file documents in paper as well as in "portable document format" (PDF) on computer disks, for uploading to the new system. In early 2004, attorneys will be able to file documents, in selected cases, directly with the courts over the Internet.

The CM/ECF system offers users several advantages. The most obvious advantage is full access to current court files, both docket sheets and filed documents. Users can access the system via the Internet from any location twenty-four hours a day. Users can also download and print documents directly from the system, thereby reducing or eliminating mail, courier, and copy fees. The system also does away with the problems of lost files or documents -- and trying to find a parking space at the courthouse!

No added fees are charged for filing documents over the Internet using CM/ECF. However, existing document filing fees still apply. The CM/ECF system uses standard computer hardware, an Internet connection and a browser. Documents are required to be in PDF form and are downloadable from the internet once linked to the docket sheet. Documents are prepared using conventional word processing software, then converted to PDF. Users wishing to prepare themselves for the advent of CM/ECF are advised to review their equipment to make certain it meets the minimum system requirements. The court recommends the following hardware and software:

- a. A computer running a Windows operating system is preferred
- b. Adobe Acrobat 3.0 or higher to convert documents from a word processor format to portable document format (PDF)
- c. A PDF-compatible word processor like Macintosh or Windows-based versions of Corel WordPerfect and Microsoft Word
- d. Netscape browser version 4.6x or 4.7x or Internet Explorer 5.5 (128 bit encryption is strongly recommended)
- e. Internet access
- f. Access to a scanner if non-computerized documents need to be imaged
- g. A **PACER** account to view docket sheets and electronically filed documents
- h. All fonts embedded in PDF records must be publicly identified as legally embeddable (i.e., font license permits embedding). The base 14 fonts are: Courier (Regular, Bold, Italic, and Bold Italic), Arial MT (Regular, Bold, Oblique, and Bold Oblique), Times New Roman PS MT (Roman, Bold, Italic, and Bold Italic), Symbol, and ZapfDingbats.

PACER facilitates electronic access and is the primary interface with the CM/ECF system, to view docket sheets and other case information. It also allows access to images of court documents, if the document has been electronically filed and is in the category of documents viewable by the public. All electronic public access to case file dockets and documents occurs through PACER. Upon receipt of a Notice of Electronic Filing (NEF), attorneys are permitted one free view at the document within 30 days of filing. Beyond the 30 day period, there is a \$0.07 per page charge not to exceed \$2.10 per document.] Potential users should also ensure that they have active PACER logins and passwords. For more information about PACER, go to <http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/>. Finally, users should submit their attorney registration forms (available at the courts' website) and then sign up for training dates as soon as it is posted as open on the court's website. If an attorney has already been approved to e-file in another federal court through a CM/ECF system and has an assigned login and password, the training requirement in Connecticut could be waived.

Potential users who wish to familiarize themselves with the CM/ECF system are invited to visit the court's website. The website offers an on-line tutorial and also provides information about opportunities for hands-on training. Training sessions will be scheduled at the New Haven courthouse on a regular basis through early 2004 and attorney participants will receive four (4) hours of continuing legal education (CLE) credits for attending a session. In addition, visitors to the court's website will be able to review the latest draft of the court's administrative procedures governing the use of the CM/ECF system.

For more information on CM/ECF and training in the district court, visit the court's website www.ctd.uscourts.gov or contact Project Manager Victoria Minor at (203) 773-2430 or by e-mail at victoria_minor@ctd.uscourts.gov.